From: WizSupport.com
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/23/02 4:38pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

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To whom it may concern;

My name is Peter Petersen. I am a professional in the IT field. I am a Certified Professional in both Apple and Windows PC technologies; I make my living fixing problems in other folks' computer hardware and software. I have been involved as a professional in the computer industry in one aspect or another for several years now; I have, in the past, been involved in PC hardware and software sales as well as retail management. Most currently I am engaged as an entrepreneur, starting my own computer repair/tech support business dealing with PC Wintel and Macintosh hardware and software. I am writing to voice my opinion on the Microsoft Antitrust Settlement proposal.

As an IT professional, I have seen the computer industry take shape from the early days of hobbyists building Heathkit PC's from parts, to the rise (and fall) of the IBM PC, to the move toward mainstream that the PC software industry took in the early 1990's, through the explosion of the World Wide Web that brought the internet out of the realm of students, educators, government agencies and hackers, and into the public mainstream. I have seen Microsoft's rise to dominance as a company and have often ruminated on what shape our industry would have taken if Microsoft had not been the dominant, agressive business they are. To the contrary of what I'm sure the pro-microsoft people are saying, the technological world would not have ground to a halt without Microsoft. In fact it is my belief that the exact opposite would have occurred; our technology level over all would be at a much higher level than it is now if there were no Microsoft.

One of the most telling examples of how Microsoft's business practices have shaped our current state of technology is in the world of consumer software and home PC peripherals. I have been in this industry long enough to remember the way computer manufacturers did business before the "Microsoft Way" became commonplace. It went something like this: 1) Company X designs and writes software code (or builds printer, scanner, etc). 2) Software is tested and tested; bugs in programs are found and fixed. 3) Program or device works and is 100% satisfactory before it ever hits store shelves. 4) If, for some reason, there are problems after it reaches the marketplace, they are handled by a qualified support staff who are fully trained to address problems with that device or program. This process sometimes means a product is late getting to the marketplace, but it almost always works once it gets there. Now: Enter Microsoft, who is self-admittedly more concerned with meeting product deadlines than meeting quality standards. Microsoft develops a similar product to Company X, but they spend less time and money on quality assurance. As a result, their product arives at the marketplace sooner and costs less to consumers. Company X is forced to cut corners in order to compete. The first thing Company X cuts out of their budget is their lengthy Quality Assurance process; that way they'll be able to at least keep up with Microsoft's deadline.

Nevermind that they now are releasing a knowingly-imperfect product ahead of schedule. But in order to compete with Microsoft's lower price, they are also forced to cut their post-purchase support; which means the chances of the imperfections being fixed after the product leaves the store shelves are also less. Most manufacturers have no choice but to rely on automated telephone menus or ambiguous FAQ web pages instead of live people talking customers through their problems; if a program has serious flaws the manufacturer might release a version update patch. In any other industry a company would be in serious trouble if they knowingly released a product before it was ready for consumer use. Nowadays, however, most computer softare and hardware manufacturers are doing just this because it is the only way they're able to compete with a company that gives away their product or forces it on people as an integrated part of their operating system. It has become an accepted business practice in the computer industry to release products regardless of their flaws, and it's my opinion that this would be vastly different without the dominance of Microsoft in the picture.

Some of the Microsoft rhetoric I have heard contains words like "Innovation". Clearly, Microsoft's definition of this word is a different one than that which the rest of the English-language-speaking world uses. Microsoft has never innovated anything - even their first official operating system product, MS-DOS, was purchased from Seattle Computer Works before being licensed to IBM for use in the first IBM Personal Computer. I'm sure by now you've heard all of the stories about Windows being modeled after the Macintosh operating system; Microsoft's other "flagship" product, Office, is made up of components that had their beginnings in other programs as well. Excel wasn't the first spreadsheet program; that honor goes to VisiCalc. MS Word is not the first graphical word processor; many companies developed similar products for the (pre-Macintosh) Apple II and Commodore 64 platforms before IBM PC's were even sophisticated enough to handle such graphics-intensive products. Even the concept of an "Office Suite" of programs is borrowed from AppleWorks, a venerable integrated software package that also hails back to the early Apple II days. In the entirety of Microsoft's impressively-large catalog of software products, there is not a single one that is based on an original Microsoft idea. They all have their roots in products that were first conceptualized at other companies. Most of those companies are now either out of business or have been purchased outright by Microsoft and "brought into the fold".

It has been argued that any punishment of Microsoft would have devastating effect on our economy. I believe this is not true; if anything the economy would be stimulated by such an action. If Microsoft were forced to compete on an even level with other companies, they would find it necessary to spend the money and time necessary to insure their product's quality before releasing it; this would give other companies a chance to do the same. The industry's overall quality of products would increase, and the amount of jobs at every tech-sector

company would increase as companies would hire more employees to bolster their Quality Assurance departments. It would also give an edge to companies developing alternative operating systems like Linux which would allow them to gain a more competitive market share.

One possible alternative to an outright breakup of the company would be an injunction requiring them to freely distribute the source code to their operating system and browser products. This would put them on even footing with Open-source operating systems (Linux, FreeBSD) and Browsers (Opera), and would guarantee fair business practices by effectively removing the operating system/browser integration war from even being an issue. Microsoft could still charge $300 for their Office products if they wanted to, but there wouldn't be any way they could financially exploit their dominance in the operating system market; they wouldn't automatically get $100 for every PC sold as is the case currently. This in turn would change the incentive in developing operating systems from one of profit to one of functionality and stability - which would eventually translate to better products.

Thank you for taking the time to read; in parting I urge you to do whatever is necessary to limit Microsoft's ability to suppress the computer industry's overall quality by forcing other companies to adopt Microsoft's poor quality standards in order to stay competitive.

Sincerely,

Peter Petersen

"I call this the mismatch problem: The world is gray but science is black and white. We talk in zeroes and ones but the truth lies in between."
-Bart Kosko, author, Fuzzy Thinking